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# Hooray for Che

by DEREK MALCOLM

"RELAX, CHE," says Castro as Guevara fulminates against the Russians' decision to withdraw their missiles from Cuba, "Pour yourself a drink." It doesn't sound quite right, now does it? Any more than that honest-to-goodness American voice sounds right when it announces, towards the end of Richard Fleischer's "Che" (Carlton, Haymarket) that the CIA was in no way implicated in Guevara's capture and death. The first line is an absurd mistake in characterisation and tone, the second is simply a fib. And the trouble with this decently liberal but dreadfully simple-minded movie is that it abounds in both kinds of basic error. So much so, in fact, that in the end one would not recognise the truth about this martyr revolutionary if one actually saw it on the screen.

Yet it is not as absurd a piece of film-making as a first glance at the cast list would imply. Omar Sharif is Che and Jack Palance plays Castro. Quite apart from looking remarkably like the two men, both actors have brave and on the whole dignified stabs at translating their lines into some

form of believable persona. Sharif, in particular, is a great deal less hollowly stoic than usual. He clearly believes that there was something in the asthmatic Che to cause all those reverberations, and he causes us to believe it too. In its heavily compromised way, so too does the film, in spite of its desperate attempts to preserve the sort of balance beloved of nervous Hollywood producers. One is only surprised that Fleischer has got away with what he did. Perhaps, of course, he hasn't.

What he has tried to say is that Guevara was a decent and dedicated man who believed he was fighting for a just cause but who was in the end destroyed by his own fervour and impatience. Give or take an adjective or two, that seems reasonably fair to me. Sophisticated film-goers may mock the way he says it, though it is the sort of film even they will have to admit as competently made to an old formula. But your actual, less cynical customer may well judge less harshly and find the issues, even as presented here in black and white instead of grey, worth arguing about.